DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 294 UD 031 101

AUTHOR Rumbaut, Ruben G.
TITLE The New Californians: Assessing the Educational Progress of Children of Immigrants.
INSTITUTION California Univ., Berkeley. California Policy Seminar.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 14p.; Abridged from Chapter 2 of "California's Immigrant Children: Theory, Research, and Implications for Education Policy" edited by Ruben G. Rumbaut and Wayne A. Cornelius and published by the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
JOURNAL CIT CPS Brief; v8 n3 Apr 1996

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Adjustment (to Environment); Asian Americans; Case Studies; *Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Hispanic Americans; *Immigrants; Language Minorities; *Limited English Speaking; Minority Groups; Public Schools; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *California; *San Diego Unified School District CA

ABSTRACT

No state has felt the impact of the new immigration more than California, and no institution in the state has felt more effects than the public schools. A third of the nation's 20 million immigrants are concentrated in California, and more than a third of the state's public school children speak a language other than English at home. This review is intended to provide some insight into the determinants of the educational progress and adaptation of the children of recent immigrants in California schools. Results are reported from a new comparative research study of the performance of children of immigrants in the San Diego schools, focusing on Mexicans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and East Asian groups. The survey gathered information on characteristics and backgrounds of 2,420 students in grades 8 and 9. Case studies of children of immigrants (Southeast Asian, Punjabi Sikh, and Mexican American) in high schools in three different areas of California are also reported. Evidence from these studies suggests that most of the children of immigrants are making a rapid and positive adjustment, and that they are often outperforming even native-born majority groups. These data offer a challenge to conventional theories of academic attainment among ethnic minorities and suggest that some minority groups do well in spite of cultural and linguistic differences. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

The New Californians: Assesing the Educational Progress of Children of Immigrants.

ED 398 294

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Andrea Spurgeon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED 031101

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CPS brief

Vol. 8, No. 3 April 1996

A Publication of the California Policy Seminar

THE CALIFORNIA POLICY SEMINAR IS A JOINT PROGRAM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AND STATE GOVERNMENT

THE NEW CALIFORNIANS: ASSESSING THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS

Rubén G. Rumbaut

No state has felt the impact of the new immigration more than California, and no institution more than its public schools. Fully a third of the nation's 20 million immigrants are concentrated in California, and over a third of California's K–12 public school children speak a language other than English at home. These new Californians are extraordinarily diverse; they hail largely from Asia and Latin America, and include both the most educated and the least educated ethnic groups in the United States today. Their children are growing up in a context where economic restructuring, a prolonged recession, and accompanying fiscal woes have exacerbated a deep public discontent particularly aimed at immigrants, as evidenced by the passage of Proposition 187 in 1994. Yet for all of the political controversy surrounding the public education of the children of immigrants — and even though they will become a crucial component of the larger economy and society in the years to come — very little is known about their educational progress and adaptation patterns.

The import of this new generation of immigrant children coming of age in America goes far beyond its immediate impacts on school systems, state budgets, and fiscal policies. How well they adapt will ultimately be the measure by which the long-term consequences of the present wave of immigration are gauged. Will these children of immigrants move into the middle class or into an expanded multiethnic underclass? Will the structure of opportunities enable them to achieve upward social mobility, or will their way be blocked by racial discrimination and a changed economy? What will be the ratio of success stories to the tales of urban woe? The answer to those questions will determine, more than anything else, how this era of mass migration will change American society; but the fate of this new generation of children of immigrants — whether born here or abroad — remains a mystery that only now is beginning to be unraveled by new research. Indeed, expectations of a linear, generation-by-generation process of assimilation into the mainstream of American life, extrapolated from conventional notions of the historical experience of earlier waves of European immigrants, are seriously open to question, for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, recent studies suggest that most

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the California Policy Seminar or the Regents of the University of California.

2020 MILVIA STREET, SUITE 412
BERKELEY, CA 94704
(510) 642-5514

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

of the children of this new immigration are making a rapid and positive educational adjustment. The studies reported below summarize some of that evidence.

The New Immigration and the New Californians

The 1990 U.S. census counted a foreign-born population of 19.8 million, about 8% of the total population. Most are recent arrivals; most of the recent arrivals come from Asia and the Americas, and most of them have settled in California. Nearly half (8.7 million) immigrated to the U.S. during the 1980s, and 25% came in the 1970s; given current trends, more will come during the 1990s than in any other decade in U.S. history. For the first time, foreign-born Latin Americans replaced those born in Europe as the largest immigrant population, and the total born in Asia also surpassed the total born in Europe. While only 10% of the U.S.-born population resided in California in 1990, fully a third of the foreign-born lived here, including about 40% of all immigrants from Asia and Latin America. More lived in the Los Angeles metropolitan area than in the New York metropolitan area (2.9 vs. 2.1 million); Orange and San Diego counties absorbed 1 million immigrants, while the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose corridor accounted for 825,000 more. Whereas in 1980 15% of all Californians were foreign-born, that proportion had climbed to 22% by 1990, and has continued to rise ever since. As a consequence of sharply increased immigration, combined with higher fertility, these populations of newcomers are growing much more rapidly than native-born groups — a phenomenon that is redefining the state's ethnic mosaic, and especially that of its school system.

Today's immigrant groups differ greatly from one another not only in their English language skills, age/sex structures, patterns of fertility, and forms of family organization; they also include by far the most educated groups (Asian Indians, Taiwanese) and the least educated groups (Mexicans, Salvadorans) in American society, as well as the groups with the lowest poverty rates in the U.S. (Filipinos) and the highest (Laotians and Cambodians) — a reflection of polar-opposite types of migrations embedded in very different historical and structural contexts. All of these distinctive group characteristics can be expected to interact in complex ways with different contexts of reception — government policies, existing ethnic communities, employer preferences, the color line — to mold divergent adaptations among both the first and second generations.

This review is intended to provide some insight into the determinants of the educational progress and adaptation of the children of these new immigrants in California public schools. I report results from a new comparative research study of the educational performance of children of immigrants in San Diego schools (including dropout rates, grade-point averages [GPAs], achievement test scores, and educational aspirations), focusing on the largest groups: Mexicans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and East Asian groups. This is followed by a review of three illustrative case studies of the adaptation of immigrant high school students who reside in different parts of California: Southeast Asian refugees, Punjabi Sikhs from India, and Mexican immigrants.

Children of Immigrants: Determinants of Educational Progress

For an analysis of the educational progress and prospects of the new Californians, I turn first to the findings of a recently completed survey of 2,420 Mexican, Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and other Asian and Latin American students in San Diego. The students surveyed were in the eighth and ninth grades, a level at which dropout rates for all ethnic groups are still relatively low. To be eligible for inclusion in the study, a student had to be either foreign-born or U.S.-born with at least one foreign-born parent. Eligible students were then administered the survey questionnaire at school during the spring 1992 semester.

Most of the respondents were 14 or 15 years old. The sample is evenly split by gender and grade level. By generation, 44% are U.S.-born children of immigrant parents (the "second" generation), and 56% are foreign-born youths who immigrated to the U.S. before age 12 (what I previously called the "1.5" generation). Among the foreign-born, the sample is also evenly split by age at arrival: about half had lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more (they were preschool-age at arrival), while the other half had lived in the U.S. nine years or less (they had reached elementary school age in their native country but arrived in the U.S. before adolescence). The survey gathered data on the students' demographic characteristics, family, socioeconomic status, ethnic self-identity, peers, language, hours spent on homework and television,

educational and occupational aspirations, perceptions of discrimination, self-esteem, and depression. School data on GPAs, Stanford reading and math achievement test scores, limited English proficiency/fluent English proficiency classification, gifted status, and related variables were obtained from the respective school systems for all the students in the sample.

Levels of parental education were lowest for the Mexicans and the Indochinese, especially the Laotians and the Cambodians; and the Indochinese also had the highest proportions by far of parents who were not in the labor force. The Filipinos and the "Other Asians" (Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Indians) showed the highest proportions of college graduates among mothers and fathers, and their families were much more likely to own rather than rent their homes. As a reflection of this, Mexican and Indochinese youth (especially the Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao) were the most likely to be attending inner-city schools, Filipino youth the least likely. Asian groups had a higher proportion of families with both natural parents at home.

Nearly two-thirds of the student sample said they *preferred* to speak English, including substantial majorities in almost every group and nearly nine out of 10 Filipinos. The single exception was the Mexicans, but even among them 45% already preferred English. The Laotians and the Cambodians, two-thirds of whom were classified by the schools as having limited English proficiency, also had the lowest scores on two tests: the four-item English Language Index and the Stanford reading achievement test. In contrast, the "Other Asians" showed a level of ability in the Stanford math achievement test that was well above national norms, followed by the Vietnamese and Filipinos; the high proportions of these students who are classified as gifted by the schools were also well above district norms. The Hmong, Mexicans, and Cambodians scored well below national math norms, followed by the Lao. The students' math rankings generally reflected the socioeconomic status of their parents. Most of the ethnic groups reported very high educational aspirations, led by the "Other Asians"; the Hmong, Lao, Cambodians, and Mexicans, on the other hand, expressed notably lower occupational aspirations.

Little is known about the characteristics that distinguish students who are classified as limited English-proficient (LEP) and fluent English-proficient (FEP) by the schools, although that is a critical status assignment, governing the inclusion or exclusion of the student from the mainstream school curriculum — and the access to resources, teachers, peers, and opportunities that goes with it. LEP identity is also a stigmatized status that carries a heavy dose of social opprobrium. Our data show a stark bifurcation between LEP students and FEP and English-only students in socioeconomic status, educational and occupational aspirations, self-esteem, and other variables. Parents of students who speak English only were the most advantaged by every socioeconomic indicator, and the parents of LEP students were the most disadvantaged. But the disparities between FEPs and LEPs were far greater than those between the FEPs and the English-only students, especially with regard to home ownership and to the likelihood of attending inner-city schools: while 72% of LEP students attended inner-city schools, only 30% of the FEPs and 18% of the English-only speakers did. Despite the socioeconomic advantages of the English-only students, FEP bilingual students had significantly higher GPAs (and perhaps also significantly, were more likely to live in intact two-parent families).

In a multivariate analysis that controlled for English ability, time in the U.S., and grade level, I found that the odds of being LEP were significantly higher for older boys in the inner city, whose parents were unemployed and uneducated and did not own their home. The strongest statistically significant effect was observed for inner-city location. Mexican, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian ethnicity also significantly increased the odds of LEP assignment, for reasons that were not at all clear.

The association between social class and educational attainment and aspirations suggested above did not extend to GPAs. For example, despite their poor performance on achievement tests, the Hmong earned the highest academic GPAs of all the groups except for the high-achieving Vietnamese and "Other Asians." One measure of effort provides a main reason: Hmong students devote by far more hours per day to homework than any other group. (In general, Asian-origin students put in the most homework time and Latin American students the least.) Students with the highest ratios of homework-to-television-watching hours had the highest GPAs. *Significantly, over time and generation in the U.S., their English proficiency and reading achievement test scores went up, but the number of hours spent on homework went down, as did*

GPAs. This result confirms similar findings among immigrant students in California and elsewhere.

To explore this further, I conducted a more powerful statistical analysis of four key outcomes: academic GPA, math and reading achievement test scores, and educational aspirations. Among parental and family variables, family socioeconomic status (particularly home ownership) had strongly positive effects on all outcomes. Parental education had no significant direct effects on GPA, but it did on math and reading test scores as well as on educational aspirations; such aspirations plummeted, however, in cases where one or both parents were unemployed. Students living in a home with both natural parents were significantly more likely to have higher GPAs. Time in the U.S. was, as expected, strongly predictive of improved English reading skills; but despite that seeming advantage, *longer residence in the U.S. and second-generation status was connected to declining academic achievement and aspirations, all other things being equal. That finding does not support a linear assimilation hypothesis.* In fact, having a parent who was also U.S.-born was strongly associated with *lower* GPAs; students whose parents were both immigrants outperformed their counterparts whose mother or father was native-born. By contrast, having a peer group made up of co-ethnic friends who were also children of immigrants had a positive effect on GPA — and the positive influence of such peers who may also be oriented toward an achievement ideology of hard work extended to math scores as well. Clearly, the effort invested in daily homework paid off across the board in higher grades, test scores, and aspirations for the future; by contrast, the hours spent daily watching television were associated negatively with all outcomes across the board. *Taken together, these results point to the association of achievement outcomes with an immigrant ethos that seems to be affirmed within the context of co-ethnic peer groups and intact immigrant families, yet that appears to erode with increasing exposure and assimilation to native norms and contexts.*

With all predictor variables controlled for in these models, Mexican and Vietnamese ethnicity nonetheless retained strong and significant effects on virtually all outcomes: Mexican origin was *negatively* associated with GPA and test scores (but not with aspirations), while Vietnamese ethnicity was *positively* linked to all four outcomes — again, for unclear reasons. In this kind of statistical analysis, "Mexican" or "Vietnamese" might stand for nothing less than the culture, history, and collective memory of an entire group as embedded in the American context. To gain more insight into these and other possibilities, we consider the findings of three other selected case studies.

Three Case Studies

This section highlights the findings of case studies of children of immigrants attending high school in three different areas of California in the 1980s: Southeast Asians in Southern California, Punjabi Sikhs from India in Northern California, and Mexicans in Central California. These three groups represent very different types of immigrants and refugees — in terms of migration histories and motives, cultural backgrounds, and contexts of reception in the United States. However, in contrast to the children of well-educated "brain-drain" immigrants, most of these high school students came from poor families. These studies underscore the need to understand the complex diversity of immigrant student adaptations in the larger social context (including the school context) within which they are situated, invented, tested, negotiated, and accomplished.

Southeast Asian Refugee Students in San Diego Secondary Schools

In the early 1980s I directed a panel study — the Indochinese Health and Adaptation Research Project (IHARP) — which conducted in-depth interviews with a representative sample of Indochinese refugees in San Diego. The sample included 739 adults from the five major Indochinese ethnic groups — Vietnamese, Chinese-Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao — ranging in age from 18 to 71, with about equal numbers of men and women. The interviews were conducted in the home and language of the respondents and collected migration histories and data on social background, English proficiency, employment, income, acculturation, and mental health. A follow-up study examined the educational adaptation of all children of these refugees who were enrolled in the San Diego Unified School District. Complete academic histories for this sample of Indochinese students (including GPAs and standardized achievement test scores) were obtained from the school district in 1986 and again in 1989 and matched with our

1983 data on their parents and households. Combined data were thus collected for 239 (in 1986) and 340 (in 1989) secondary school students, and these were supplemented by intensive ethnographic fieldwork. Thus the investigators could analyze the effects of parental and family characteristics measured in 1983 on their children's academic achievement three and six years later.

This subsample is representative of the large majority of children who immigrated with one or both parents. They are members of what I referred to as the "1.5" generation of refugee youth who were born in Southeast Asia but are being educated and coming of age in the United States. The socioeconomic profile of the households in the youth study matched in most essential respects that of the larger IHARP study on parents.

Vietnamese and Chinese students showed the highest levels of educational attainment. They had higher GPAs and higher California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) scores in math and reading, and less than half were classified as LEP. Although their reading scores were below the national average, their GPAs were well above those for native whites in the district and their math achievement scores placed them in the top quartile nationally. Cambodian and Lao students showed the lowest levels of attainment both in GPAs and test scores among these refugee groups, although their GPAs matched the norm for native whites and their math scores were at about the national average. The ranking of these four groups paralleled that of their parents' level of education: Vietnamese parents were the most educated, followed by the Chinese, Cambodians, and Lao. Surprisingly, the Hmong students occupied an intermediate position in both GPAs and test scores, despite the fact that Hmong parents had by far the least amount of education (just above the first grade level). Thus, the refugee students' current educational achievement was not simply a function of their parents' socioeconomic backgrounds.

About 75% of these students lived in households with incomes below the federal poverty line; indeed, their families were the poorest in the San Diego area. About 90% of the Vietnamese and Chinese students lived together with both parents, as did about 83% of the Hmong and the Lao. Less than half of the Cambodians lived in two-parent households — most lived with widowed mothers, reflecting the extremely high death rates in Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime in the late 1970s. Cambodian mothers also showed the most elevated levels of depressive symptoms, followed by Hmong and Lao mothers. The Cambodians and the Lao were the most recently arrived groups and hence had spent fewer semesters in American schools and had a higher proportion of LEP students.

Several student characteristics showed significant positive effects on GPA: the younger the students and the longer in U.S. schools, the higher their GPA, and FEP students had a clear advantage over LEP students. Parents' education and English literacy did not influence GPA directly, but income and household size did (increasingly so by 1989). This latter result goes against the grain of conventional wisdom, which presupposes that the larger the household, the fewer resources parents have to invest in their children. Fieldwork in the Vietnamese community, however, suggested an opposite social-capital explanation: the largest families were organized as "mini school systems," with older siblings tutoring the younger ones and giving them harder practice tests than the ones they got at school, even in the absence of any direct parental involvement in the school or in homework.

Two subjective variables were also strongly associated with GPA: the level of psychological distress of the mother (the higher this score, the lower the GPA), and the parents' sense of ethnic resilience and reaffirmation (the higher their score in this regard, the higher the GPA). The latter score was a summed index of four items, which expressed the degree to which parents felt that (1) their ethnic group must stay together as a community to preserve their own culture and identity even as they adapt to the American economy to "make a living"; (2) they should stick together as a group for social support and mutual assistance; (3) they should live in co-ethnic neighborhoods; and (4) they would *not* return to their homelands even if there were a change in government. This index thus provided a general measure not of assimilation or "Americanization" as such, but rather of accommodation among parents who intend to stay in the U.S. while affirming their ethnic culture and social networks. Both of these variables (measured in 1983), and especially the latter, remained significant predictors of the child's GPA in both 1986 and 1989. The latter finding supports results reported in a 1991 study of Indochinese students in five other U.S. cities, as well as those from the 1992 San Diego survey reviewed above, but runs

counter to the conventional assumption that the more Americanized immigrants become, the greater will be their success in the competitive worlds of school and work. *Instead, it suggests an opposite proposition: that rapid Americanization processes, all other things being equal and to the extent that they involve "subtractive" rather than "additive" forms of acculturation, may be counter-productive for educational attainment.* Americanization, as will be illustrated further by the next two case studies, can be hazardous to an ethos of hard work and achievement.

Punjabi Sikh Immigrant Students at "Valleyside High" in Northern California

Over the past two decades, immigrants from India have constituted the most highly educated group of newcomers to the United States. There is considerable internal diversity among the Indians, however, as illustrated by Margaret Gibson's ongoing study of the children of Punjabi Sikhs attending "Valleyside High School" in an agricultural region of Northern California. Most of the Indians in Valleyside, who in 1981 numbered around 6,000, were Punjabi Sikhs. The Punjabis emigrated primarily for economic reasons, but like the rural-origin Cambodians and Laotians, most of them came from Punjabi farming villages in northern India. The baseline study, conducted during 1980–82, collected school performance data for all 2,100 students attending Valleyside High (grades 9–12), of whom 231 (11%) were Punjabi Sikhs. Intensive ethnographic research then focused on the experiences of a random sample of 44 Punjabi seniors and a comparison group of 42 native white (Anglo) seniors.

At the time of initial fieldwork, the median income for Punjabi families with children enrolled at Valleyside High was about $15,000 — roughly half the income of comparable Anglo families. A third of the Punjabis had been in the U.S. less than five years, a third between five and 10 years, and a third over 10 years. Half of the Punjabi fathers worked as farm laborers in the nearby fruit orchards, usually for the minimum wage; another quarter (mostly those who had come by themselves before 1970 and later sent for their wives and children) had become entrepreneurial orchard farmers themselves, and the remaining quarter commuted to factory jobs in Sacramento or the San Francisco Bay Area. The majority of the Punjabi mothers (much like the Hmong and the Cambodians) were illiterate or semiliterate. The fathers were more educated, but less than half of them had finished secondary school in India. Punjabi was the language spoken at home, and most parents spoke English only with difficulty.

Compounding these socioeconomic and language handicaps was the "severe prejudice" that confronted the Punjabi students at school as well as "sharp conflicts" between home values and those promoted by the school. Gibson describes it this way:

> Valleyside is "redneck" country, and some white residents are extremely hostile toward immigrants who look different, act different, and speak a different language. In school, Punjabi teenagers are told they stink . . . told to go back to India . . . accused of being illegals . . . physically abused by majority students, who spit at them, refuse to sit by them in class or in buses, crowd in front of them in line, stick them with pins, throw food at them, and worse. They are labeled troublemakers if they defend themselves. . . . In one way or another, Punjabi students are told that India and Indian culture are inferior to Western and American ways . . . criticized for their hairstyle, their diet, and their dress . . . faulted because they defer to the authority of elders, accept arranged marriages, and believe in group decision making . . . condemned most especially for not joining in majority-dominated school activities and for resisting as best they can the forces for cultural assimilation.

Despite their relative disadvantages, the Punjabi high school students generally exhibited better school performance than the Anglo majority. Eighty-five to 90% of the Punjabis graduated, compared with 70–75% of Anglo students. Among the Punjabis, there were strong relationships between age at arrival in the U.S. and performance in high school (patterns also observed among the Indochinese students in the San Diego study), and that variable was a stronger determinant of educational attainment than were the parents' income, education, occupation, or level of English proficiency. Upon entering the ninth grade, more Punjabis (overwhelmingly those who had emigrated from India after the fourth grade) than Anglos were classified as LEP and placed into remedial or ESL English classes, while more Anglo students were placed into remedial math. Punjabi students who had received all of their education in the U.S. were as likely as their Anglo classmates to be placed in college-prepara-

tory courses. During high school, Punjabi boys surpassed the GPAs of their majority peers, and were more likely to take advanced math and science classes and to express aspirations for careers in computer science, engineering, and electronics. Punjabi girls tended to enroll heavily in business classes in their last two years of high school, reflecting their parents' wishes that the girls should marry first, leaving decisions about higher education and career options to be made later with their husbands and in-laws.

Unlike the Punjabi students, most Anglo students participated in extracurricular activities at school, held after-school jobs, and maintained an active social life. Anglo boys in particular invested little time in homework and held to the view that the senior year was "kickback time," explaining that they could always take advanced classes in math, science, or English later on in college. By contrast, the Punjabis (especially the girls) led extremely restricted social lives, and 75% of the boys reported doing more than an hour of homework each day on average. They were rarely absent from school and reportedly created few discipline problems, and teachers characterized them as "highly motivated, hard working, and coming from households where the parents seemed to value education." Punjabi parents pressured their children not to have too much contact with non-Punjabi peers, which would "dishonor" their families and community, and defined "becoming Americanized" as "forgetting one's roots and adopting the most disparaged traits of the majority group" — including leaving home at age 18 to live independently, making decisions without parental consent, dating, and dancing. Their frame of reference was not the Anglo majority group, but rather members of their own ethnic group here and in India, and from this comparative point of view the Punjabi immigrants expressed considerable psychological satisfaction with their situation overall. At the same time, the parents urged their children to abide by school rules and to learn useful skills from their teachers, to ignore racist remarks and avoid fights, to look up to successful American adult role models, and to become proficient in English and in the ways of the dominant culture in order to help them deal with the host society — provided that they *also* maintained strong roots within the Indian community. Gibson referred to this *additive* bicultural strategy as *"accommodation without assimilation"* — a process again reminiscent of the findings in the Southeast Asian case study.

Immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican-Descent Students at "Field High" in Central California

The Mexican-origin population constitutes by far the largest ethnic minority in California schools, and throughout the twentieth century Mexican immigrants have constituted by far the largest segment of both documented and undocumented immigration to the state. Indeed, Mexican immigration to California has accelerated since the end of the bracero program in 1964. However, official data on the educational performance of Mexican immigrant children are unavailable from school districts, for two reasons: the "Hispanic" ethnic category used by the schools lumps all Spanish-speaking students together irrespective of nativity or country of origin, and the presence of a sizable component of U.S.-born children who speak Spanish at home makes it impossible to rely on FEP or LEP classifications as signifiers of immigrant status.

However, one comparative study, reported in 1986 with a follow-up in 1991, does address the educational performance of Mexican-descent students enrolled at "Field High School" in a small coastal community in Central California. The economy of this community (in the Santa Cruz area) has long been tied to agricultural production and to immigrant farm labor, and the region has experienced successive waves of immigrants over the years, especially from Mexico. In 1971, 60% of the total enrollment of 2,507 students were Anglos and 34% were Spanish-surname students, but by 1984 only 33% of the 2,377 students were Anglos while the proportion of Spanish-surname enrollments had jumped to 57%. The Asian student population (primarily of Japanese and Filipino ancestry) increased from 5% to 10% over the same period.

The class of 1985 was selected for analysis in this study. The 643 students in this class entered Field High as ninth graders in September 1981. School data showed that 40% of Anglo students failed to graduate with their class in 1985, compared to only 13% of Japanese Americans and 51% of Spanish-surname students. Significantly, however, only 35% of the Spanish-surname students who had been classified as LEP (primarily immigrants) failed to graduate, whereas the majority of the Spanish-surname students identified as U.S.-born had dropped out. This finding was supported by a 1987 study by another investigator in a different community.

Intensive ethnographic fieldwork by Maria Matute-Bianchi identified five general categories of ethnic identity into which most Mexican-descent students in Field High could be placed:

Recent Mexican immigrant students. These were Mexican-born, Spanish-speaking students who are most frequently classified by the school as LEP and placed in ESL classes, and who are also identified by other Mexican-descent students as well as teachers and staff as dressing differently (unstylishly) from the rest of the student body. In interviews these students claimed a "Mexicano" identity and considered Mexico their permanent home. Students within this group included "legals" and "illegals," permanent settlers and those who migrated seasonally back to Mexico, and they generally made other distinctions among themselves that are of significance in Mexico, such as their rural versus urban origins and "mestizo" versus "indio" ethnicity. These students differed significantly in their level of proficiency *in Spanish*, and the most academically successful were those who were most proficient in both oral and written Spanish (reflecting their class origins and level of previous education in Mexico). Almost all of them, however, were described by teachers and staff as more courteous, more serious about their schoolwork, more respectful and eager to please, more industrious and well behaved, as well as more naive and unsophisticated than all other students at Field High.

Mexican-oriented students. These were most often bilingual students with various degrees of proficiency in English, though they spoke Spanish at home and were typically classified by the school as FEP. They had strong bicultural ties with both Mexico and the United States, reflecting the fact that most of them were born in Mexico but had lived in the U.S. for more than five years. They claimed an ethnic identity as "Mexicano" and were very proud of their Mexican heritage even as they saw themselves as different from the Mexican *"recién llegados"* (recent immigrants) and from the "Mexican-Americans," "Chicanos," and "Cholos." They saw the latter two in particular in derogatory terms, as people who have "lost" their Mexican culture, while they viewed "Mexican-Americans" as "arrogant" people born in the U.S. of Mexican parents. The students in this group tended to be active in soccer, and especially in the Sociedad Bilingüe club, the most visible Mexican-oriented organization on campus. The club was involved throughout the year in fund-raising events for college scholarships and cultural events such as school dances and the Cinco de Mayo "Semana de la Raza" celebrations in May. Most of these students were academically successful. Indeed, virtually all of the Mexican-descent students who graduated in the top 10% of their class in 1985 were identified by teachers and other students as members of this group.

Mexican-American students. These were native-born students of Mexican parentage who identify themselves as such (or as "Americans of Mexican descent"). They were much more American-oriented than the two other types just described, and they clearly distinguished themselves from the "Mexicanos." They often did not speak Spanish well (or even if they did, they preferred to speak English in school), and were frequently described by school personnel as "totally assimilated." At the same time they considered the term "Chicano" offensive and synonymous with "Cholo" and "Low Rider." Some of the most active and academically successful students at Field High were in this group. They did participate more than any of the other Mexican-descent groups in mainstream school clubs and in student government (along with the Anglos and Japanese-American students); significantly, few of them got involved in either the Mexican-oriented club (the Sociedad Bilingüe) or in the Chicano-oriented MATA club (Mexican-Americans Taking Action).

Chicanos. This group made up the largest segment of Mexican-descent students at Field High, with perhaps as many as 40–50% of the Spanish-surname enrollment. They did not find the term "Chicano" offensive, though many of them also identified themselves as "Mexicano." Instead, they referred derisively to academically successful Mexican-descent students (those seen carrying books around the campus, who attended classes regularly and obeyed school rules) as "schoolboys" and "schoolgirls," and they referred to the more assimilated Mexican-American students as "wannabes" ("wanting to be" white or Anglo). They reflect an *oppositional* orientation to what they perceived to be mainstream norms and values, and behaved in ways that promoted failure (frequent absences from or disruptive behavior in classes, failure to bring their books or to do their homework when they did attend).

These students were most distinguished from the preceding three groups by their level of alienation from the school. They were much more concerned with

"loyalty" to the Chicano group than with school programs or activities, with the exception of their activities in the MATA association. In practice, according to Matute-Bianchi, to be a Chicano meant "to hang out by the science wing . . . *not* eating lunch in the quad where all the *gringos*, 'white folks,' and schoolboys hang out . . . cutting classes by faking a call slip so you can be with your friends at the 7-11 . . . sitting in the back of a class of *'gabachos'* and *not* participating . . . *not* carrying your books to class or doing your homework . . . *not* taking the difficult classes . . . doing the minimum to get by." (In a follow-up study, Matute-Bianchi found that recruitment into a Chicano identity begins in elementary school and is confirmed and reinforced by the time the student reaches junior high school, when similarly minded peer groups begin to assume much greater influence.)

Cholos. This was by far the smallest of the five Mexican-descent groups, but also the most easily identifiable by their deliberate manner of dress, walk, speech, and other highly visible stylistic cultural symbols. They were frequently identified by others as gang members or gang sympathizers (though not all students who manifested the sartorial Cholo symbols were gang members), and as "Low Riders." Like the Chicanos, the Cholos too are held in low esteem both by the other Mexican-descent students and by mainstream students, they are marginalized and disaffected from the school community, do poorly academically, and tend not to be involved in any school activities. Teachers generally perceived the Chicanos and Cholos as more "irresponsible," "disrespectful," "mistrusting," "sullen," "smart-mouthed," "street tough," "apathetic" and "less motivated" than their ethnic counterparts — and explained their poor school performance as the inevitable result of such attitudes and behaviors ("secondary cultural differences"). By contrast, teachers explained the poor performance of other Mexican-descent students as based on their difficulties with English or the relative lack of skills and school savvy among those who come from peasant backgrounds in Mexico — in short, on the basis of "primary cultural differences."

Matute-Bianchi interviewed two subsamples of "successful" and "unsuccessful" Mexican-descent students over a two-year period to ascertain their educational and occupational aspirations and perceptions of the future. The successful students tended to see a definite connection between their high school education and their adult futures. They expressed an interest in going to college and looked upon adults at Field High as role models of success. "Success" was often defined as "being someone" and having "a nice car, a nice house, a nice job, and enough money that you don't have to worry about it anymore." Many of these students were born in Mexico and received their earliest schooling there. Their families immigrated to the United States voluntarily in search of economic opportunities, and their frame of reference is "back home." Their parents typically showed strong interest and support for their schoolwork.

These successful students were primarily Mexican-immigrant and Mexican-oriented students who felt no contradiction between maintaining an identity as Mexicanos and adapting themselves to the American context, which they saw as a prerequisite to getting ahead. This definition of the situation resembles the "accommodation without assimilation" response among the Punjabis and the Indochinese — holding selectively to one's own culture while appropriating elements of the mainstream culture that are likely to ensure future economic well-being.

By contrast, unsuccessful students lacked positive adult role models, defined success in terms of "working the system," said they came to school mainly to see their buddies, and generally had no clearly articulated sense of their adult futures. Others focused fatalistically on enduring, external barriers to opportunities: "Mexicans don't have a chance to go on to college and make something of themselves. . . . People like us face a lot of prejudice because there are a lot of people who don't like Mexicans. . . . Some people, no matter how hard they try, just have bad luck." Most of these students were nonimmigrant Chicanos or Cholos who faced what they perceived as a *subtractive,* either/or, dilemma between doing well in school *or* being a Chicano. To "act white" was to be disloyal to one's ethnic group. Additive accommodations to the mainstream culture, in the sense of doing well in school and participating in extracurricular activities, was not seen as an option to the maintenance of collective identity. On the contrary, according to Matute-Bianchi, the construction of this ethnic identity, forged through a "reactive process" and "intensive intragroup reliance . . . as a disadvantaged, disparaged minority group," is a multigenerational product of "historical and structural forces of exclusion and subordination by the dominant

group, as well as the vehicle of resistance that the group has made to structured inequality." Similar observations about the development and maintenance of such an "oppositional identity" have also been made regarding black high school students by Fordham and Ogbu.

Conclusion

The foregoing studies focused on recently arrived immigrant and refugee groups of widely different sociocultural origins. Despite their modest socioeconomic backgrounds, a climate of pervasive prejudice, and initial obstacles in adapting to their new school environments in California, *the evidence suggests that most of these children are making a rapid and positive adjustment — and remarkably, in many instances they are outperforming even native-born majority-group high school students in such basic indicators as grades and graduation rates.* These data offer a challenge to conventional theories of educational attainment among ethnic minority groups, particularly those explanations that have attributed the relatively poor school performance of native-born minorities to "cultural deficits," "cultural deprivation," a "culture of poverty," "cultural discontinuity," and "cultural and language differences," and those which see educational achievement and success as a function of "straight-line" assimilation processes.

Indeed, these findings add to a mounting body of evidence which suggests that some minority groups do well in school even though they do *not* share the language and culture of the dominant group that is built into the school system. In fact, some of those who are doing exceptionally well in American schools differ *more* from the dominant group in language and culture than those who are doing less well. Furthermore, other comparative evidence suggests that a minority group that does poorly in school in its own country of origin or has an involuntary minority status (such as Koreans in Japan) appears to do much better when its members voluntarily immigrate to another country where its language and culture are even more different than those of the dominant group of the host society (such as Koreans in the United States). Such evidence does not necessarily prove the thesis — self-selection factors, for example, may account for some of the observed differences in the Korean case. Nevertheless, although nearly all immigrant children confront substantial social adjustment and academic learning problems initially, these problems seem to diminish over time for some but seem to persist and to become aggravated for others. Why this is so remains an unanswered question.

Along these lines, the work of John Ogbu and his associates has focused on a minority group's experience in the post-school opportunity structure and on how its members' perceptions of dismal future economic opportunities influence their perceptions of and responses to schooling. From this point of view, variability in the educational performance of minorities is partly a function of the history and structure of their subordination (especially those groups marked by an "involuntary" entry into the dominant society and their collective memory of a bitter history of racial oppression and blocked opportunities for social mobility); and partly a function of the minority groups' particular strategies of response to their situation, which can make them, according to Ogbu, "more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure."

Ogbu proposes a dichotomy that hinges on a minority group's original mode of entry into the society and argues that the responses of "immigrant (voluntary) minorities" differ significantly from those of "castelike (involuntary) minorities." For the former, learning English and other aspects of the culture of the dominant group is seen — from the vantage point of a "dual frame of reference" — as a barrier to be overcome in school through additive learning, but not necessarily as a threat to their own collective identity. Hence, "accommodation without assimilation" emerges as a feasible definition of the situation and strategy of response. For the latter, however, their responses are marked by an "oppositional" frame of reference that is conducive not to "additive" adaptations but to reactive or passive-aggressive forms of resistance to a school system they may perceive as ultimately irrelevant to their future adult opportunities. Here accommodation without assimilation is not an option, as illustrated by the case of the Chicanos and Cholos summarized above; instead, members of adversarial minorities tend to perceive a forced choice between "acting white" *or* being loyal to the group, with counterproductive consequences.

These are valuable and provocative ideas, although the "voluntary/involuntary" dichotomy is perhaps too Procrustean, formulaic, and riddled with exceptions to do justice to the complexities and dynamics of diverse social contexts. In any case, other studies have shown that the

development of "oppositional" subcultures does not require a history of racial oppression and the formation of reactive ethnicities. In Jay MacLeod's ethnographic study of leveled aspirations in a mostly white inner-city housing project, for instance, the typecast roles were reversed: it was a peer group of white youths, the Hallway Hangers, who repudiated the achievement ideology, validated an adversarial posture toward school, rejected teachers (who were seen as irrelevant and at best a conduit for manual labor jobs), and kept "a lid on hope" to protect their self-esteem. Their pervasive cynicism reflected family histories dominated by failure (some had been on public assistance in the projects for three generations); as white youths they could point to no extenuating circumstances to explain their poverty; their oppositional subculture was in part a reaction to the stigma they felt as poor whites; and the peer group itself attracted those with low aspirations who rejected school, and then deepened and shaped those proclivities to fit the group. By contrast, the Brothers, a group of black teens, developed an entirely different definition of the situation. They accepted and validated as a peer group an outlook that connected hard work to future payoffs, could point to racial discrimination in the past as a way of explaining their families' poverty, and felt themselves part of an upward social trajectory. Their outlook was also a reaction against the Hallway Hangers' penchant for drugs, alcohol, and adversarial stance toward school ("as long as I don't end up like that"). Taunted and abused by a group of disaffected white boys, the Brothers dissociated themselves completely from the Hangers and pursued a distinctly different path. Unlike the Hangers, moreover, the Brothers' parents still exercised a good deal of authority over them, and their older siblings could serve as positive role models. Interestingly, it turns out that the Brothers were mostly children of recent immigrants from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the West Indies, as well as of African Americans who had migrated up from the South.

For new immigrants in California — and in American schools generally — the findings reviewed above point to a positive association between school performance and a resilient affirmation of collective ethnic identity. But as the case study of native-born Chicanos (and African Americans) also suggests, mere affirmation of ethnic solidarity cannot by itself explain positive or negative educational outcomes. The issue has to do instead with the specific nature, content, and style of the groups' perceptions and adaptive responses to their specific social and historical contexts. Such a focus needs to take into account human agency itself, viewing students — minority and majority, immigrants and nonimmigrants alike — as active participants in their own development, not merely passive objects of impersonal circumstances.

Rubén G. Rumbaut is professor of sociology at Michigan State University and taught at the University of California, San Diego, and San Diego State University from 1978 to 1993.

This *Brief* has been abridged from Chapter 2 of *California's Immigrant Children: Theory, Research, and Implications for Education Policy,* edited by Rubén G. Rumbaut and Wayne A. Cornelius and published by the Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego. The original chapter contains additional case materials, extensive data tables, and references. The book comprises 10 other chapters:

—Educating California's Immigrant Children: Introduction and Overview
—Segmented Assimilation Among New Immigrant Youth: A Conceptual Framework
—Additive Acculturation as a Strategy for School Improvement
—Korean and Russian Students in a Los Angeles High School: Exploring the Alternative Strategies of Two High-Achieving Groups
—The Psychological Dimension in Understanding Immigrant Students
—The Cultural Patterning of Achievement Motivation: A Comparison of Mexican, Mexican Immigrant, Mexican American, and Non-Latino White American Students
—Testing the American Dream: Case Studies of At-Risk Southeast Asian Refugee Students in Secondary Schools
—School Restructuring and the Needs of Immigrant Students
—Are Our Schools Really Failing?
—Commentary: Politics, Education, and Immigrant Children in New York City

California's Immigrant Children can be obtained from the Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies, Department 0510,

UC San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0510. The cost — payable in advance by a check made out to the UC Regents — is $21.95 per book; the postage is $3.50 for shipping (plus $1.00 for each additional book). California residents must pay a 7.25% tax.

The UC Latina/Latino Policy Research Program, administered by the California Policy Seminar, provided funds to support the publication of California's Immigrant Children.

UK25

California Policy Seminar
2020 Milvia Street, Suite 412
Berkeley, CA 94704

Nonprofit
Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Berkeley, CA
Permit No. 1

Prof. Arthur Cohen
UCLA
Dept. of Education,
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024